

VZCZCXRO7532  
PP RUEHFK RUEHKSO RUEHNAG RUEHNH  
DE RUEHKO #3541/01 3660342  
ZNR UUUUU ZZH  
P 310342Z DEC 08  
FM AMEMBASSY TOKYO  
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 9782  
INFO RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC PRIORITY  
RHEHAAA/THE WHITE HOUSE WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY  
RUEAWJA/USDOJ WASHDC PRIORITY  
RULSDMK/USDOT WASHDC PRIORITY  
RUCPDOG/USDOC WASHDC PRIORITY  
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC PRIORITY  
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RHMFIUU/USFJ //J5/JO21//  
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RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK 3103

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 05 TOKYO 003541

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DEPT FOR E, P, EB, EAP/J, EAP/P, EAP/PD, PA;  
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E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [OIIP](#) [KMDR](#) [KPAO](#) [PGOV](#) [PINR](#) [ECON](#) [ELAB](#) [JA](#)

SUBJECT: DAILY SUMMARY OF JAPANESE PRESS 12/31/08

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ARTICLES:

(1) Yomiuri-Waseda joint opinion poll: LDP seen as strong on economic and foreign policies, while DPJ has the edge on social security issues

YOMIURI (Page 2) (Full)  
December 25, 2008

According to a joint opinion survey (face-to-face interviews, Dec. 6-7) carried out by the Yomiuri Shimbun and Waseda University that focused on whether the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) or Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ) was preferred in the next Lower House election, voters took the view that in the economic and foreign affairs areas, an LDP administration would be better able to implement policy,

while the DPJ would do better at carrying out policy in the social-security area. Especially in the foreign diplomacy area, the gap between the LDP and the DPJ was great. The public has great anxiety about the DPJ in that area.

Regarding economic, foreign, and social welfare policies, the question was asked which party, the LDP or the DPJ would be able to bring about better policies. On economics, the LDP received a 41 PERCENT approval rating, while the DPJ picked up 31 PERCENT . On foreign affairs, the LDP was favored by 55 PERCENT of the electorate, compared to an 18 PERCENT approval rating for the DPJ. On social security issues, such as pensions -- seen as disadvantageous to the government and ruling camp -- the DPJ picked up 42 PERCENT approval to the LDP's 29 PERCENT .

In the survey, if we look only at the 50 PERCENT who answered, "The DPJ has the capability of being in charge of the government," those who answered that the DPJ was better at implementing foreign policy only reached 29 PERCENT , far less than the 45 PERCENT who thought the LDP better in this area. The respondents seemed to be saying that in order for the DPJ to be evaluated higher in its potential to be the party in power, it would first have to shift to a more pragmatic foreign policy.

On the question - "Which administration would be better politically in reflecting the will of the people?" - the DPJ garnered 43 PERCENT , outpacing the LDP with its 26 PERCENT rating. Even on the question, "Which administration would be able to properly implement its pledges to the public?", the DPJ was favored by 30 PERCENT , while the LDP took 25 PERCENT of the tally. The evaluation of the

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DPJ has increased in terms of its stance of directly communicating with the public.

The poll was carried out jointly with Professor Aiji Tanaka of the Political and Economic Department of Waseda University. Targeted were 3,000 eligible voters nationwide, of which 1,747 responded (Response rate of 58.2 PERCENT ).

(2) China to start building aircraft carriers as symbol of being a major power

ASAHI (Page 4) (Slightly abridged)  
December 31, 2008

(Beijing, Kenji Minemura)

China will soon start building an aircraft carrier, a desire the nation has cherished for 20 years. Huge expenses and high-level technology are needed for building a carrier, but China has decided to launch the project. Behind the decision is its growing awareness of being a major power, reflecting its strengthened economic presence and the success of the Beijing Olympics. Meanwhile, the nation is trying to dispel concerns among its neighbors about its being a threat.

A specialized Chinese newspaper that is close to the military recently carried an article expressing a strong desire for acquiring aircraft carriers. The article said: "In the face of such imminent issues as disputes over the East China Sea, the Senkaku Islands (called the Diaoyutai Islands), and the South China Sea, it is absolutely necessary for our nation to build aircraft carriers. Foreigners will no longer despise us if we protect the lives of overseas Chinese on our own."

Aircraft carriers are taken as a symbol of being a major power, as Colonel Lee of the Navy's research institute said in a TV program in the spring 2007: "Aircraft carriers are a reflection of a nation's overall strength." China began earnestly tackling the construction plan just after the Beijing Olympics in August, based on this judgment: "We now find it easier to obtain support from the people, because they have been animated by a spirit of patriotism and have become more confident through the Olympics," said a researcher at a military think-tank.

Many believe that aircraft carriers are indispensable for China to secure energy. About 70 PERCENT of the oil that China imports from the Middle East and Africa go through the Indian Ocean, which falls under the influence of the U.S. Navy. In the Chinese military, there is fear that the U.S. military might block the sea lanes in the event of a military conflict in Taiwan."

China has been at odds with Southeast Asian countries over the Spratly Islands. In this conflict, China has the problem of its fighters' insufficient cruising distance, but this problem will be settled once China acquires aircraft carriers. Some observers speculate that China might be aiming to carry forward negotiations to its advantage.

The recent moves of China will inevitably cause the "China as a threat" argument to grow stronger. Northern Command Adm. Commander Keating said in December: "If China seeks to develop an aircraft carrier, we will carefully keep watch on its moves."

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China is trying to show "consideration to the U.S.," according to a military source, by deploying aircraft carriers not at the squadron responsible for waters around Taiwan but at the one in charge of the South China Sea if the nation acquires carriers.

There are still unresolved issues in building aircraft carriers. High-level technology is needed. In addition, huge costs are needed. A diplomatic source in Beijing said: "The U.S. might be encouraging China to possess aircraft carriers with the aim of having China wastefully spend money on its military." Some in the military also say that submarines are more effective." A Chinese national defense professor commented: "Traditional aircraft carriers are no longer mainstream equipment in an age of information war." As it stands, many are still negative about the idea of China building aircraft carriers

(3) Shaky alliance-5 years on the battlefield (Part 3): Court rules hard task unconstitutional, shocks SDF members, families

YOMIURI (Page 1) (Full)  
December 21, 2008

The Self-Defense Forces was put to the test in Iraq. In July 2006, the Ground Self-Defense Force pulled out of Samawah. At the time, the United States asked the Air Self-Defense Force to extend its airlift activities in Iraq to Baghdad and other areas for multinational forces.

"We thought to ourselves that we would be able to help the Iraqi people with reconstruction through the Ground Self-Defense Force's activities. However, our new task was totally different." With this, Col. Atsushi Nishino recalled his Iraqi days when he was commanding a Kuwait-based ASDF detachment tasked with airlift activities in Iraq. The primary purpose of the SDF's activities in Iraq was to provide humanitarian and reconstruction assistance to the Iraqi people. This purpose was going to be changed to the role of backing up the multinational forces. Young ASDF members sent there were upset. "For what are we going to run the risk? This question came from among them.

Lt. Gen. Kunio Orita, who heads the Air Support Command, a unit in charge of commanding ASDF activities in Iraq, hurried to Kuwait, where he was pressed by ASDF members there. "That's not what we've heard," one of them said to Orita.

Orita thought there that he had to show something convincing to them who were "suddenly ordered to fly to Baghdad." He said:

"Japan cannot defend the nation by itself alone. We need to have a firm grasp on the United States. We should back up the United States when it is in need. That's the way the alliance should be. Without this sense of solidarity, the alliance is just a piece of paper. You guys work so hard to defend the Senkaku islands and the Sea of Japan."

Right before that time, North Korea, pushing for its nuclear development, launched seven ballistic missiles. In November 2004, a Chinese nuclear-powered submarine violated Japan's territorial waters. Japan was surrounded with the serious threats. Orita justified the new task for a closer alliance with the United States.

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It was convincing enough to many of the ASDF members there, Orita says. The government, however, told the ASDF not to disclose how many U.S. military and multinational force soldiers the ASDF carried on its C-130 cargo planes. That was partly because the government did not want the ASDF to spill the beans about military operations conducted by the U.S.-led multinational forces. In point of fact, however, the government probably did not want to be criticized as "blindly following" the United States.

The ASDF has only one C-130 unit. That is the 1st Tactical Airlift Division, which is assigned to the ASDF's Komaki base in Aichi Prefecture. The task in Iraq was on a four-month rotating basis. However, pilots and maintenance service crewmen are specialist personnel. Many of them were therefore sent on the Iraq mission as often as four or five times. There are also 16 ASDF members who could not be by their parents' bedside when they died.

All the more for the foregoing reason, ASDF members on the Iraq mission and their families at home were shocked at the Nagoya High Court's ruling this spring that the ASDF airlift activities in Iraq are unconstitutional. There was another shock to them. The leading opposition Democratic Party of Japan (Minshuto) presented a bill seeking to repeal a law under which the ASDF was tasked with the airlift activities in Iraq. There were a number of demonstrations near the Komaki base against the Iraq mission. "What I'm doing might be wrong." So saying, one ASDF pilot left the service.

Last month, there was a message from U.S. Secretary of Defense Gates. In the delivered message, the Pentagon chief expressed his gratitude to the families of ASDF members sent on the Iraq mission for their devoted support of those ASDF members. "I was thankful," a senior Defense Ministry official recalls. However, Japan is split over the alliance and its importance. Japan's international cooperation-which depends solely on the SDF personnel's sense of mission-could go under sooner or later.

#### (4) TOP HEADLINES

Asahi:

Violent global changes: There is no escape from chain of crisis

Mainichi, Nikkei, Sankei & Tokyo Shimbun

Tokyo stocks suffer record loss of 42 PERCENT in 2008

Yomiuri:

Nishimatsu Construction suspected of offering illegal donations to politicians, including Ozawa, Mori

Akahata:

Labor unions' battle producing great achievements

#### (5) EDITORIALS

Asahi:

(1) Reform public corporations to strengthen civilian power

(2) Tibet issue: Now is good time for dialogue

Mainichi:

(1) Review of 2008: Cracks appearing in national systems

Yomiuri:

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(1) Promote Futenma relocation plan as agreed on between Japan, U.S.

(2) Chinese economic slowdown causing social unrest

Nikkei:

- (1) Make use of record low stock prices as step to redesign life plan
- (2) Proposal by seven LDP, DPJ members on pension system significant

Sankei:

- (1) China's 2008 Charter calling for end of JCP regime: Political reform unavoidable
- (2) Thorough debate needed on status of limitations, with rescission in mind

Tokyo Shimbun:

- (1) Take financial crisis as turning point

Akahata:

- (1) Strengthen solidarity and support in the new year
- (6) Prime Minister's schedule, December 30, 2008

NIKKEI (Page 2) (Full)  
December 31, 2009

09:30

Took a walk around his private residence in Kamiyama-cho.

12:00

Met with New Komeito Vice President Junji Higashi at a Chinese restaurant in the Hotel Okura.

14:06

Arrived at his private office in Nagata-cho.

18:00

Arrived at his private residence.

18:31

Met friends from the time of his studying in the U.S., with his wife at a Chinese restaurant in Minami-Aoyama.

21:48

Returned to his private residence.

ZUMWALT